

PROGRAM OF MONTANA FISHERIES DIVISION

By
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Presented at Agency Report Session of first meeting of Montana Chapter, American Fisheries Society, Helena, Montana, November 17, 1967.

I will start by describing our outfit before starting on our program. One way to do this is to say we have 56 permanent employees in the fisheries division in Montana. Of these, 27 are in the hatchery section (7 superintendents, 7 foremen and 13 fish culturists and hatcherymen), 24 are in the management section (20 are biologists and 4 are fieldmen), 5 are in administration (2 secretaries, 1 division chief and 2 assistant division chiefs).

Another way to describe us is to say we have 43 budgets for separate projects in our division. 2 are administrative, 11 are hatchery and spawn taking, 14 are state management projects and 16 are federal aid research or development projects. (1 is BCF financed and the rest are D.J.).

Since I cannot possibly describe 43 projects in 10 minutes, I will summarize - These projects may vary from general surveys of individual waters (like our Flathead Study) to investigating specific problems (like our dewatering study), to physical repair or improvement of lakes and streams (Spring Creek channel work), to production of fish at a hatchery (like our Anaconda station). The annual budget for all projects in the division is from \$8 - \$900,000.

Two characteristics of our division are, I believe, a direct result of the size of Montana and the quality of its fishery resource. These two characteristics are our district system of organization, and our habitat (rather than species) oriented program. We have had, and still have, a few statewide projects and probably the people who have worked on these - from Thoreson's farm pond survey in 1950 through John Cox's distribution trips from Somers to Fort Peck, to Boland's present pollution study - best understand the reasons for a district organization in Montana. I might add that these advantages are quite apparent to the people in Helena also as we head home from Noxon, or Scobey, or Yaak, or Dagmar.

I think we can say with little fear of contradiction and a great deal of satisfaction in our own good fortune that Montana has the best stream-trout fishery in the U. S. today. Because of the quality of this thing we work with, our division is considerably more concerned with measuring and describing what makes it tick and then trying to preserve these qualities than we are in trying to develop or find some different species or race of fish that will utilize some unused portion of natural habitat or some new habitat the water developers have given us. We will not ignore the new habitat - although we may secretly wish to do so - we will just give it a minimum of effort and then get on about our business of saving streams.

Two philosophies govern these actions: First, the reservoir will always be there (using always in the human and not the geologic sense) but the stream may not. And after we have either succeeded or failed to save a good part of our stream resource, we - or another generation of fishery managers - can always work on the reservoirs. Second, we believe it is the proper responsibility of the ones who dam, dike and divert our present resource to finance the studies upon which to base mitigation measures and to finance the mitigation measures as well. This is not to say we would ask the federal government to step in and manage, for example, Canyon Ferry. We see no reason to run Montana tax dollars through Washington to finance another agency so it can manage our resource for us. We do believe, however, if some well-heeled construction agency is going to present us with a brand-new, expensive, management problem - they should jolly well pay for it.

This generalization of a habitat oriented program is not strictly true on the entire statewide picture, but I believe the exceptions support my contention that the resource governs the program. It is only in the one Northwest District (with its many lakes and reservoirs and mostly infertile streams) and in the two eastern districts (with their farm ponds and mostly intermittent streams) that we are putting any great amount of effort into reservoirs, and lake management and into species manipulation. And in a further demonstration of this (and also

incidentally a demonstration of the provinciality which is one drawback of the district system) the greatest internal critics we have of our few lake, reservoir and species studies come from the districts that have the best stream-trout resources.

That then is the orientation of our resource. Now what do we do about it? What is the type and quality of our biological work? Really, it isn't very deep. We consider ourselves to be the front line troops of fishery management, paid by sportsmen to manage their resource and to make fishing better where we can. Thus, in general, we will do our basic management studies and our action programs and leave the detailed biological research to the Universities, Colleges and Units. This is not to say we see no need for such research. Surely many of the tools we are using in management today are the result of work somewhere that started out without any specific management problem in mind and no doubt similar studies going on today will provide us with future management tools. Nor is it to say we will let the pressures of our management obligations make us callous or indifferent to the concerns of aquatic biologists engaged in more basic work than ours. I can assure you that we are not going to knowingly either wipe out any of Montana's native aquatic fauna, nor are we going to introduce anything that is likely to do so.

Note that I use the word knowingly. It is possible (but not too likely, I hope) that in the course of our broad management investigations, we may not know that some species in danger of extinction was in an area we are going to rehabilitate. For example, one fisheries manager in a district for about four years, completely misidentified one minnow species for two of these years. Yet, he had one of the most aggressive, successful and popular district management programs of any in the state. Thus, what would have been a very serious fault on a University research team, was no problem whatever in a successful district fisheries management program.

The point I am trying to make here is that one real value I see in this new organization is the exchange of information between agencies. And, if after information is exchanged, you see us headed in a direction that is going to step on the toes of something that is your responsibility or concern, let us know. We have so many more fishery workers than other agencies in Montana, and yet are so small ourselves, in relation to the construction and land management agencies we must deal with, that in the heat of battle sometimes we forget there are other professionals who are also interested. I hope these meetings will keep us reminded that we are not alone.